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OPEN LETTERS.

SCIENTIFIC CHIEF FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE.

To the Editors of the Botanical Gazette:—The editorial in the GAZETTE for September relative to a scientific chief of the Department of Agriculture gives an entirely wrong impression as to the position of those in charge of the botanical work here. So far as I am aware, the entire scientific corps of the Department are in favor of a chief such as is contemplated. My open letter in the GAZETTE for September has no bearing upon this question, but was written in answer to the statement that there is a dissipation of energy and a duplication of work in the botanical branches of the Department, and that this could be avoided by certain changes, which, in the judgment of the writer, would destroy the autonomy of the present divisions.—B. T. GALLOWAY, *Washington, D. C.*

THE CHECK-LIST¹ AND THE NEW ILLUSTRATED FLORA OF NORTH AMERICA.²

To the Editors of the Botanical Gazette:—Ever since the publication of the above cited *Check-list* many and very diverse opinions have been expressed as to the advisability of adopting this work with its numerous changes in nomenclature. The various discussions upon this subject have, however, been largely confined to the question whether such changes are advisable or not, while very little has been said about the possibility of making all these changes. We should like, therefore, to submit to American botanists a brief statement of this phase of the question: the possibility of correcting old names.

It appears to the writer that some of the requirements that are most needed for undertaking this kind of work are: (1) access to the type-specimens, (2) a broad linguistic knowledge, (3) a thorough familiarity with botanical terminology, (4) a long continued study of systematic botany in field and library.

¹ List of Pteridophyta and Spermatophyta growing without cultivation in north-eastern North America. Prepared by a committee of the Botanical Club. New York: 1893-4.

² N. L. BRITTON and HON. ADDISON BROWN: An Illustrated Flora of the Northern States and Canada. New York: 1896.

We would ask whether the lately published volume of the illustrated *Flora of North America* is really sufficient to satisfy American botanists in regard to these requirements, so that the *Check-list* may be unanimously adopted. That the *Check-list* and the new *Flora* are closely connected is evident when we look at the names of the authors and contributors, although two have withdrawn from the former publication. We can, therefore, with good reason compare the character of the *Check-list* with that of the illustrated *Flora*, and we feel inclined to think that the order of publication ought to have been first the *Flora* and afterwards the *Check-list*.

Without going into details as to these publications, at least not in this place, we desire to submit the following questions in order to secure an early discussion of the matter :

1. Does the family diagnosis in the illustrated *Flora* seem sufficient to separate closely related families, and have the most important distinctions been given ?
 2. Does the terminology correspond with well recognized usage at home and abroad ?
 3. Are the descriptions correct in regard to morphology, as adopted in leading systematic works ?
 4. Does a consideration of this *Flora* with these questions in mind satisfy the botanist that the authors of the *Check-list* were in full possession of the necessary requirements ?—THEO. HOLM, *Washington, D. C.*
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THE NATIONAL HERBARIUM AND THE DIVISION OF BOTANY.

To the Editors of the Botanical Gazette.:—In view of an evident lack of correct information regarding the recent change in the custody of the National Herbarium it has seemed desirable that a brief sketch of the present relationship and work of the Division of Botany and the Herbarium be presented to your readers.

During at least the past three administrations, covering a period of nearly twelve years, there has been a feeling among the authorities of the Department of Agriculture that the Division of Botany should be relieved of the custody of the National Herbarium, that institution having grown beyond a mere consulting herbarium to the dimensions of a great governmental repository of botanical collections, thereby becoming a fit charge for the Smithsonian Institution. As a result of negotiations between the two establishments, the herbarium was transferred about two years ago from the Department of Agriculture to quarters in the fireproof building of the National Museum, which is under the direction of the Smithsonian Institution, the Department, however, continuing to furnish the money for its maintenance.